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Local Agricultural Fairs are Economical Destination Points for Summer Fun
Massachusetts offers 45 agricultural fairs throughout the Bay State

BOSTON – With rising gas prices, in-state recreational activities are attractive alternatives to longer trips this summer. In the spirit of staying local, the Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) encourages families to consider visiting one or more of the nearly 50 agricultural fairs scheduled throughout the summer and fall from the Berkshires to Cape Cod.

From major county-wide fairs to smaller youth or community-based events, agricultural fairs offer exhibits, livestock competitions, farm-fresh food, local crafts and more. Farmers compete in livestock showings, local bands showcase a variety of musical genres and animals are on display to feed and pet. From fireworks displays to tractor trailer rides, demolition derbies and chain saw carving contests, attractions at local agricultural fairs are numerous and varied. Besides being fun, a visit to an agricultural fair is a way of learning about and supporting local agriculture.

”Visiting an agricultural fair is not only a fun day of activities for the family, it is also a great way to learn more about the importance of local agriculture as food quality and food safety become increasingly more important to consumers,” said DAR Commissioner Doug Petersen.

Some of the first agricultural fairs and horticultural societies were developed in the Commonwealth. It was in the fall of 1807 that the father of American agricultural fairs – Elkanah Watson – bought two Merino sheep and exhibited them under an elm tree in Pittsfield’s public square. Seven years later, Pittsfield held the first agricultural fair in the United States. Soon, the idea of farmers showcasing their livestock and other offerings to an audience caught on and grew into what is now known as the agricultural fair.

Starting this month, Commissioner Petersen and Assistant Commissioner Scott Soares will be fanning out through the Commonwealth to visit many of the agricultural fairs this season and celebrate the importance of Massachusetts farming.

“Local agri-tourism is a carbon footprint-friendly way to enjoy and appreciate our farming heritage as well as help maintain a vibrant agricultural community for future generations to come,” Commissioner Petersen said.

Agricultural tourism is a way for families looking for interesting summer vacations and day-trips to support Bay State farmers at the same time. Massachusetts is home to over 250 agricultural attractions open to the public, including farm tours, farm bed & breakfast accommodations, hayrides, petting zoos, workshops, picnic areas, and more.

Both agricultural fairs and agri-tourism support local agriculture through direct sales. At \$31 million, Massachusetts is first in New England when it comes to direct sales of farm products to consumers. The Bay State also ranks seventh nationally in total value of direct sales, and first in the value of direct market sales per farm, at \$24,900 per farm.

For listings of agri-tourism attractions and agricultural fairs, visit www.mass.gov/massgrown. A Massachusetts Agriculture Tourism map (including locations of state parks and recreational facilities) is available by calling 1-877-627-7476. To receive a paper copy of the Massachusetts Agricultural Fairs Directory, contact Ellen Hart, Massachusetts DAR, 251 Causeway St., Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114, or call 617-626-1742.